



CASE IN POINT

LOCATION: Dale Thacker Specialty Crops
Bow Island, Alberta, Canada

SITUATION:

- 6,600 acres total, 5,200 irrigated acres
- 19 Valley center pivots (three full-section, 16 quarter-section)

CHALLENGE: Time, vehicle wear and fuel costs of making multiple daily trips to three 500-acre pivots on land 20 miles north of main operation

DEPLOYMENT: BaseStation3™

EFFECT:

- Saves time
- Reduces fuel costs
- Minimizes wear-and-tear on trucks

Remote Monitoring Solution Pays Off for Fourth-Generation Farmer

With more than 5,000 acres to water and 19 center pivots to monitor, the team at Dale Thacker Specialty Crops was spending four to five hours a day turning pivots on and off. To make matters worse, they had to jump in a truck and drive 20 miles to check the three biggest pivots.

Kyle Thacker realized that he and the other team members were spending way too much time and energy babysitting pivots. When his Valley dealer told him about BaseStation for remote monitoring and control in 2006, Thacker could see the potential advantages. Still, it took the Thackers a couple of years to take the plunge. Once they did, they quickly discovered that BaseStation was well worth the investment.

Taking the Plunge

Located in southeast Alberta about 60 miles north of Montana and a few miles from the town of Bow Island (pop. 2,025), Thacker and his extended family grow a wide variety of crops—spearmint, dill, wheat, hemp, seed canola, yellow peas, and faba beans. They also distill mint and dill oils right on the premises.

The farm covers 6,600 acres, including the more than 5,000 that are irrigated using water that comes mainly from the Rocky Mountains. All the farm’s irrigation is done with center pivots.

“We’ve got three 500-acre pivots and 16 standard quarter-section pivots,” says Thacker, who manages the operation. “The three 500-acre pivots are located about 20 miles north of our main operation, which is one of the biggest reasons we decided to install BaseStation in 2008.”

But the family was a little hesitant to use BaseStation when they first heard about it.

“We weren’t sure if it would pay back or how well it would work, so it took us a couple of years before we tried it,” Thacker says. “We initially put it on those three big pivots and a couple of pivots closer to home.”

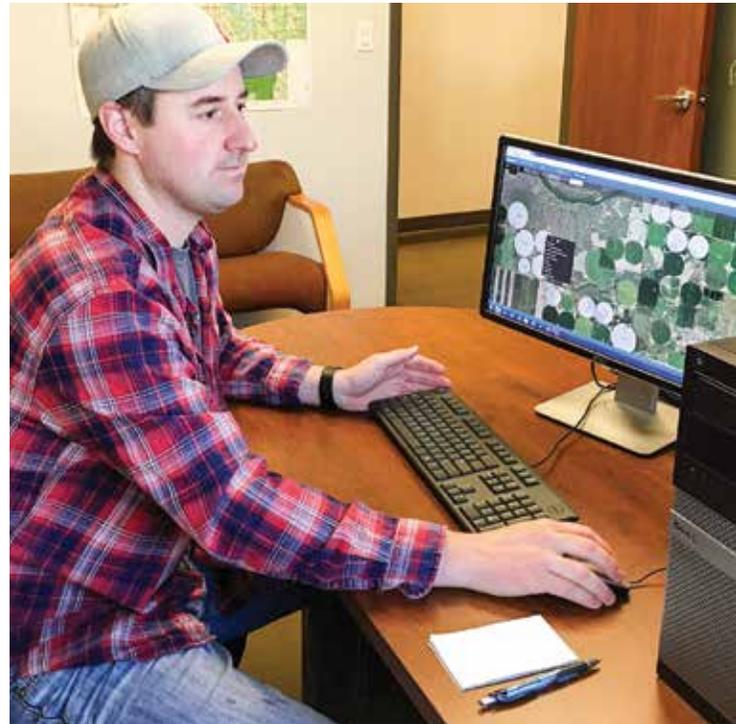


That lasted for just the first year. By the time we got to the second year we put BaseStation on everything because of how well it worked and how much time it saved us. With the remote farm, we can check the pivots from home or wherever we are. We have time to do other things on the farm like crop scouting instead of driving around starting pivots.”

Corey May of C & H Irrigation, the local Valley dealer, installed BaseStation for the Thackers.

“Corey got it all set up and made sure we had everything running,” Thacker recalls. “Any question we had, he was able to help us with.”

“When we first got BaseStation we didn’t use it to its full potential,” Thacker admits. “We just did the start-stop and checked to see if a pivot had stopped. But later on we got into the reporting and tried different things as we got more comfortable with it. Gordon (the agronomist) uses it mostly for reports on irrigation and water use and whatnot. My brother Gavin’s got it wired so that it notifies him if one of the pumps that fill the dugout has stopped or started. There are so many things a guy can do with it.”



Staying Connected

Initially the Thackers had BaseStation2, which didn’t have a mobile app, so Thacker used his iPad® and personal computer to log in. For the past couple of years the Thackers have been a test farm for BaseStation3™, which includes a mobile app. Now Thacker and the rest of the crew use their smartphones to access BaseStation3 most of the time.

The Thackers’ BaseStation3 is Internet-connected.

“We’re about two miles from a town that has cable Internet, so we send it out here with two antennas. We have a fairly fast connection with about 50-meg per second downloads,” Thacker says.

Currently 10 people on the farm log into BaseStation3: five on the management side, four full-time employees and one part-time worker.

“It’s fairly simple to use, and they didn’t have much trouble picking it up,” Thacker notes.

Thacker says that the main advantage of using BaseStation3 is the amount of time it saves.

Saving Time and Money

“It allows you to monitor everything so much faster,” he explains. “Before, you’d start a pivot and it seemed like you would just get over the hill and it would quit, but you wouldn’t realize it had quit until you went back there to check it again. But with BaseStation3 you don’t have to be watching all the time. You get a text message or an email on your phone and you can see what’s happening right away and deal with it.”

Cutting way back on vehicle costs is another big advantage of using BaseStation3.

“We used to have to drive to the pivot point to start and stop it, and the truck would bounce across the pivot tracks,” Thacker says. “Now we very seldom have to go in there unless there’s a mechanical issue.”

Being able to monitor the farm’s irrigation remotely has made a big difference in Thacker’s life. He and his wife have a six-year-old son, and BaseStation3 gives the family more time to spend together.

“We can go to the lake on the weekends and do other things that I couldn’t do when I was always babysitting pivots,” he says. “It’s been great.”